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STATE FOR NEA/MAG - WILLIAMS, LAWRENCE

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: NEW MINISTER OF DEFENSE WELCOMES STRONG BILATERAL
TIES

REF: A. TUNIS 1812

[1](#)B. TUNIS 1805

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM HUDSON FOR REASONS 1.5 (b) AND (d)

1.(C) SUMMARY. During a courtesy call with the Ambassador on August 31, new Tunisian Minister of Defense Kamel Morjane (reftels), citing common concerns, highlighted his intention to continue the long tradition of close bilateral military cooperation with the United States. He stated that the GOT is positive about concluding a SOFA and that he would look into the possibilities of GOT security assistance to Iraq. Morjane said that one of his priorities is aviation to control Tunisia's borders against terrorists, but that he was still familiarizing himself with his portfolio. END SUMMARY.

SOFA/IMET/FMF

[1](#)2. (C) Despite having only ten days of experience in the position, Morjane seemed well-briefed on Tunisia's military relations with the United States. Morjane was aware of September's planned Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) discussions and said that, although Tunisia has some questions, the GOT will work with the U.S. to conclude a SOFA. He noted "this is the type of relationship we should have." Regarding the West Point Instructor Exchange, the Minister said that there was an agreement; however, Tunisian participation was hindered by financial concerns. The Ambassador confirmed USG commitment to identifying a solution. He also encouraged Morjane to work with Tunisian Ambassador to Washington Nejib Hachana to reach out to Washington decision makers to gather further support for Tunisian-American military cooperation. Morjane recognized the value of Ambassador Hachana's efforts "on the Hill" and said he would be in touch with Hachana immediately. The Minister also added that he was aware of the U.S. interest in Sahel security issues and that he personally had a great deal of experience in Africa from his UN work, most recently as Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION/IRAQ

[1](#)3. (C) Citing Tunisia's history of participating in peacekeeping operations, and his own UN experience, Morjane said that President Ben Ali was considering how Tunisia could reinforce international peacekeeping efforts. Tunisia's reputation as a neutral, peaceful country makes it a logical participant; however, financial issues sometimes constrained its contributions. In response to the Ambassador's question about Tunisia's support for Iraq, Morjane said that the GOT had not trained Iraqi police or security forces. The Ambassador repeated Morjane's comment that Mediterranean countries send officials for military training in Tunisia and said that he thought there was a positive role Tunisia could play in supporting Iraqi security and stability. Morjane said that the GOT was concerned about the Iraqi security situation and that he would follow up on this point with the Ambassador when he was more familiar with the Tunisian position.

GOT PRIORITIES - SECURITY AND COUNTER-TERRORISM

14. (C) Morjane said that he was still reviewing his new portfolio and that his only prior defense experience was working on peacekeeping issues. However, two of his first priorities are aviation and security. On the latter, he commented extensively on the risks for cross-border terrorists and the regional environment. That said, Tunisia is a peaceful country and will continue its efforts to maintain a small but modern army that takes into consideration the regional environment. To date, the Minister said he has found the Ministry of Defense to be very well organized. Morjane explained that President Ben Ali was one of the first world leaders to focus on counter-terrorism, at a time when Western leaders did not understand. Today, said Morjane, we recognize that his efforts were visionary, and security remains the President's key focus. The GOT will continue to focus on security issues and cooperation with those who support these efforts, because "we can't achieve stability and freedom" without security.

15. (C) COMMENT. Morjane speaks fluent English and appears favorably inclined towards the U.S. He also highlighted his positive personal relationships with a number of USG officials during his years with the United Nations (see ref b and para 6 bio information). It was clear that his past UN experience gives him a much broader view of international and bilateral relations than his predecessor and that he is likely to be an ally for the USG in Tunisia. END COMMENT.

16. (U) Bio data: Morjane explained that he studied briefly in Wisconsin in 1985. In 1989, he started the MFA institute for the training of new diplomats and served as the institute director. In 1996, President Ben Ali named him the Tunisian Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva. Morjane said that in 2003 he was considered for the position of Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Iraq and sought President Ben Ali's permission for this mission, before Sergio Vieira de Mello was named. After de Mello's death, Morjane said he was again asked to serve in Iraq but uncomfortable given the security concerns.

HUDSON